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ABSTRACT

This paper explores what service-learning is and how it is intended to benefit both the community and the student participants. Service-learning is a combination of community service and experiential education. The primary goal is providing for a community need, even as the experiential education aspect advances student learning and academic goals. Scholars involved in service-learning emphasize that reflection is at the heart of the service-learning experience, transforming the experience so that service and learning inform and support each other. Service-learning in higher education is increasing dramatically as educators seek to improve instructional quality and to make a difference in their communities. Service-learning appears to be a method of instruction that offers a means of addressing some of the goals in higher education with the potential to help meet community needs as defined by the community. (SLD)

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Why Use Service-Learning in College Instruction?

The concept of service-learning is gaining increased attention on college campuses today. Many faculty are being encouraged to include service-learning activities in course work to enhance student learning and to increase community involvement. Some faculty may see service-learning as a useful teaching tool. Others may wish to explore its use, but need to study the idea further to determine whether or not it is one that has possible application within the framework of their curricular and instructional goals. In considering the possibilities for implementing service-learning experiences in college courses as well as in other educational settings, it is important to understand what service-learning is and how it is intended to benefit both the community and the student participants.

Service-learning is a combination of community service and experiential education. Community service has the primary goal of providing for a community need. Experiential education, on the other hand, is designed to advance student learning and address academic goals. Fieldwork, internships and student teaching are some examples of strategies used for experiential learning. When service-learning is used as a pedagogical approach, it can allow students to enhance their academic development while serving the community and become a means by which both students and the community benefit (Anderson & Hill, 2001). Service-learning is intended to enrich both students ad

the community. Students learn from the educational experience and the community is assisted through the service provided by the students.

Inherent in service-learning is the idea of contributing to the common good by helping others and making a difference. As such, service-learning is an educational method rooted in democratic thought. Further, it is a method as Zlotkowski (1998) points out, that helps students attend to their needs both as individuals and as community members. Service-learning "helps students avoid the schizophrenia of private advancement disassociated from public standards and public need" (Zlotkowshi, 1998, p.4.). It also presents students with opportunities to consider issues of diversity and social justice (Anderson & Hill, 2001). Consider, for example, the opportunities for students to relate to such issues as they engage in an activity as tutoring individuals who need help in furthering their educational knowledge and skills or one as conducting oral histories with senior citizens whose personal stories have not been acknowledged or documented. The service-learning involves students in civic participation and helps them to gain a better understanding of political and social structures in a community.

Scholars involved in service-learning emphasize that reflection is at the heart of the service-learning experience. Reflection transforms the experience so that service and learning inform and support each other (Callahan, et al., 2001). The Service-learning Scholars Roundtable (2000) refers to reflection as the critical link between service and learning. Through reflection students address their concerns, challenge their

preconceptions and connect their sense of self with others. In this process, cognitive, behavioral, and affective growth can be fostered.

Education for the good of society is an important theme in the writings of respected educators. Ernest Boyer (1990) issued the call for colleges and universities to become more committed partners with communities in addressing societal problems. According to Boyer, scholarship of involvement with the community should be an important aspect of the work in higher education because of the need for more vigorous engagement on the part of colleges and universities in working for the common good. Further, colleges and universities can not consider themselves as separate and apart from their communities. It is easy to note how the well being of institutions of higher education is often linked to the well being of the communities in which they are located. The current emphasis on experiential, field-based work and service for the common good is rooted in the work of Dewey (1938) who wrote of the social and educational value of meaningful, experiential learning. He viewed experience as the foundation of all education.

Service-learning in higher education is increasing dramatically as educators seek to improve instructional quality and to make a difference in their communities. Research is developing in support of the value of service-learning in educational programs. Such studies seem to indicate that service-learning can help college and university students gain knowledge through experiential learning while developing habits of critical inquiry and reflection (Root, 1997). Service-learning also provides the opportunity for increased

personal and social development on the part of students. In some cases, service-learning may even provide the opportunity for students to develop skills for functioning effectively in modern workplace settings.

Service-learning is a method of instruction that offers a means of addressing some of the goals in higher education and it has the potential to help meet community needs as defined by the community. With understanding of service-learning as a worthwhile pedagogical approach, educators can explore ways to incorporate service-learning experiences into academic programs. The challenge is to identify the appropriate alignment of the curriculum with service-learning and then to begin conversations with community representatives.

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